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THE Importance and Necessity of
Christians considering J E S U S
C H R I S T in the Extent of his
high and glorious Character.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at the SOUTH CHURCH in

B O S T O N.

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By SAMUEL HOPKINS, A.M.

Minister of the Gospel in GREAT-BARRINGTON.

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MDCCLXVIII.

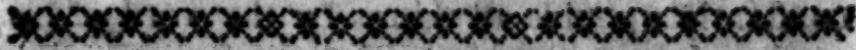
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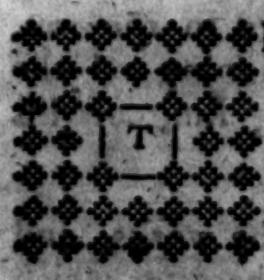


THE Importance and Necessity of considering Jesus Christ in the ex- tent of his high and glorious Cha- racter.



HEBREWS III. 1.

Wherefore, holy Brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our Profession, CHRIST JEEUS.



HE author of this epistle (generally thought to be St. Paul) has his chief attention to Jesus Christ the Mediator, and considers and exhibits his character in all its importance and grandeur, as the great, and in a sense, the only object of the christian's faith and hope. He here representes him to be GOD, and man : and particularly speaks of his incarnation; and condescending union with his people ; his humiliation and sufferings in their

their behalf, in which he became a sacrifice and made full atonement for sin, of which all the Jewish sacrifices were types and emblems.—But he first brings into view his infinitely high, grand and honorable character, as what gives dignity and worth to his whole person and all his works, and spreads a lustre and glory over all ; and without which nothing he had to say of him as Mediator and high Priest could be understood. He considers him as having a *divine* nature and character ; or the very nature and character of GOD himself ; so shining in the bright glory of Divinity,— as one who has made all worlds, and constantly upholds all things by the word of his power ; who will take to pieces and destroy the visible world, when he has by it answered the end for which he made it at first.* He speaks of him as the sole heir and possessor of all things ; † and so much greater than the angels and superior to them, who are the greatest and most noble of all meer creatures, that they are commanded to pay him the most humble obeisance, and honor and worship him as their Lord ; they being all his servants, and wholly devoted to his use. ‡ He here represents him as exalted to the top, the head of the universe, and reigning on the throne of GOD ; yea, as reigning king on his throne forever. §

In short, he ascribes to him the works, and gives him the titles, honors and character which belong exclusively to the one only true GOD ; and

* Chap. i. V. 2, 3, 10, 11, 12. † V. 2. ‡ V. 4, 5,
6, 7. § V. 8.

and applies to him those words in the book of Psalms which are addressed to the supreme GOD, the glorious JEHOVAH.

This is the august, wonderful, infinitely grand and glorious personage spoken of in the text, called the Apostle and high Priest of the christian's profession ; who is represented as most worthy of the constant and earnest attention of all christians : whom they are therefore, called upon attentively to consider.

THESE words naturally lead us to inquire—What is implied in the exhortation and command here given to christians, to *consider Christ Jesus*—Of what use and importance it is to all christians thus to consider Christ—And then make those remarks and reflections the subject will naturally point out.

TO consider Christ Jesus, is to attend to his person, character and works with a degree of true taste and discerning, with constancy and engagedness of mind.

I say this implies a degree of true discerning and understanding with respect to the character of Christ ; for where there is nothing of this, Christ is not considered at all. If his true character is not understood or known in any degree, then he is not the object of the thoughts and attention of the mind ; but something else which is different from it : for that is never the object of a person's thoughts and consideration, of which he has no true idea and conception at all. Two persons

persons may have entirely different and opposite notions of Christ Jesus : those of one may be agreeable to the truth, by which Christ's true and real character is extant in his mind : those of the other may be essentially and wholly wrong and false ; yet they may use the same name to express their different and opposite ideas and notions, and ascribe them to the same person, whom they agree to call Jesus Christ. In this case, whatever thoughts and exercises the latter has about what he calls Christ, it is certain he does not truly consider this person, but something else. And his views and exercises may not be properly called christian ; for they are really directly the reverse. Unholy persons therefore, whose hearts are in direct and perfect opposition to the excellent and glorious character of Christ Jesus, do not consider him. His character, and so the whole gospel is hid from their minds, as they are wholly without that taste and discerning, on the exercise of which Christ is known and considered. They are therefore represented in scripture as ignorant of GOD and the gospel.[¶] The *holy* only have a heart formed to that taste and discerning, by which they understand the character of which we are speaking. Such are the persons called upon in the text to consider Christ Jesus. "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." —

Nor can they be properly said to consider Christ Jesus, who leave out of their view the most essential and important part of his character.

¶ Joh. xvii. 3. 1 Cor. iii. 14. 2 Cor. iv. 3,4. 1 Joh. iv. 2

racter ; and in all their thoughts of him sink him down infinitely lower, and make him infinitely less than he really is. To consider Christ Jesus is to understand and keep in view that in his person and character which infinitely distinguishes him from all others, and in which his true excellence and glory, and sufficiency as high Priest,—as Mediator and the Saviour of sinners, chiefly consists. In a word, he who does not consider this GREAT high Priest in all the height, grandeur and glory of his character in which he is exhibited in the context, does not comply with the exhortation and command in the text.

This consideration also implies a steady, engaged attention of heart to this object, by which Christ Jesus may be, as it were, always present to the mind, and it may be hereby enlarged, and take in more and more of this grand and glorious object ; and so “ grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

How useful, important and even necessary it is for christians thus to consider the Apostle and high Priest of their profession, Christ Jesus, will appear by attending to the following particulars.

I. THE knowledge of Jesus Christ, considered in the extent, greatness and glory of his character, comprises the whole of christian knowledge.

He who knows nothing of the character of Jesus Christ, certainly has no degree of christian knowledge, and really knows nothing as he ought to know. And the knowledge of this character implies all needful knowledge. In the knowledge of Jesus Christ is implied and comprised the highest and most clear knowledge of GOD, of the divine character and perfections ; and the most important and glorious works of God. GOD in all the glory of his character is manifested and revealed in and by Jesus Christ ; so that they who see him, see GOD. * The moral character and glory of GOD shines with the brightest lustre in the face of Jesus Christ. † He who knows Christ, knows the truths and doctrines of christianity : He understands the precepts and duties of it : He knows where his true interest lies ; what is true enjoyment and happiness, and the way in which the children of men may obtain it. In a word, he is at the fountain head of knowledge and wisdom. And he only needs to follow the clue he has got hold of, and get perfectly acquainted with this object, in order to be perfect in knowledge and holiness. Therefore St. Paul turned all his attention to this great high Priest, and desired and “ determined not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified, in whom (he says) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”‡ And hence 'tis of the highest importance to every christian that he should fix and keep his attention on Christ Jesus, and constantly make him

* Joh. i. 18. xii. 45. xiv. 9.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 2. Col. ii. 3.

the object of his consideration and study, that hereby he may "increase in the knowledge of GOD, and be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."—This leads me to observe,—

2. JESUS CHRIST is an unbounded and infinite object of knowledge; so that there is foundation and room for constant and increasing progress in the highest and best knowledge, by attending to and considering him.

Some objects may be soon perfectly understood, and all is known that can be known of them: the theme is fully exhausted, and there is nothing further to engage the attention of the mind. But it is infinitely otherwise with respect to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is so great and glorious a personage, and his works are so grand and wonderful, and of such infinite and amazing influence and consequence, that a finite mind may be all attention to him, and expatiate and enlarge in views of him, without ever coming to an end, or seeing all that belongs to him. He is so great, and so much is comprehended in him, that however enlarged and grand ideas the christian has of him already, they may, by further consideration and study, be still increased, and swift advances made without end. Yea, the more the christian knows already of Christ, the better foundation, and the greater advantage he has to know yet more, and make still swifter progress in knowledge and wisdom. It is therefore, in this view, most reasonable and

important that he should be all attention to Jesus Christ.—Moreover,

3. All christian holiness and true happiness consist summarily in beholding and considering Jesus Christ in the high and glorious character he sustains.

Eternal life, i. e. all christian holiness and enjoyment, is spoken of by our divine teacher as consisting wholly in this. “ And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true GOD, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” * The only true GOD and Jesus Christ, are not here distinguished, as two distinct and separate beings : for, as has been just observed, the knowledge of Jesus Christ comprises the knowledge of the only true GOD, as he who has seen Christ, has seen the only true GOD. Therefore St. John says of Jesus Christ, “ This is the true GOD, and eternal life.” † Hence Christ asks for the redeemed, as that in which their happiness will consist, that they may be where he is, and behold him in the glory of his mediatorial character. His words are remarkable. “ Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.” ‡ Jesus Christ is, and will always be, the grand medium of all divine communications of knowledge, holiness and enjoyment to the creature, especially the redeemed. He is, in this respect, “ the bread of life,” on whom all depend for enjoyment

* Joh. xvii. 3. † 1 Joh. v. 20. ‡ Joh. xvii. 24.

enjoyment and life. And the more christians in this world behold the glory of Christ, and constantly attend to and consider him, the more holy and happy they are. For he is their only support and comfort ; and on him they hang all their hopes. And beholding in him, as in a glass, the glory of Jehovah, they are changed into the same image, in according and conforming to his character in the exercises of their hearts. Of what importance is it then that christians should always behold Jesus Christ, and be engaged in attention to his high and glorious character !

4. THE importance and necessity of the christian's attentively considering Jesus Christ in all the greatness and glory of his character, will further appear, if we consider that this character is the only ground of his pardon and acceptance with GOD ; and is that on which all reasonable and well grounded hope of pardon is placed.

Christ's ability and sufficiency to make atonement for sin, and obtain eternal salvation for sinners, so far consists in his greatness and dignity, or the excellence and worthiness of his person and character, that was it not for this he could have made no atonement at all. Was he not a person of infinite dignity and worthiness, and so higher, infinitely higher than the heavens, even a divine person and truly GOD, he would be infinitely far from being able to make atonement for the least sin, as this is truly an INFINITE EVIL, carrying infinite malignity and guilt in it's

it's very nature.* Had he not been GOD, and so a person of infinite dignity and worth, his offering to interpose in the behalf of sinners, and attempting to obtain deliverance and eternal favor for them by taking the curse on himself, making

* THE infinite evil of sin may be proved not only from the infinite greatness, perfection and excellence of GOD, against whom it is committed, which lay the creature under infinite obligation to him, as the obligation to love and obey is great in proportion to the greatness, worthiness and authority of the lawgiver ; and the crime of disobedience is always equal to the obligation violated thereby : I say, the infinite evil of sin does not only appear from this view of the matter ; but also from *the malignant nature and tendency of sin.*

Every transgression of GOD's law is an act of perfect enmity to universal being : It is against GOD and the creation, and tends to the compleat and eternal ruin of the whole ; so that if there was nothing to counteract and restrain it's influence and tendency, it would certainly issue in this. It would destroy the universe, and bring the whole, GOD and the creature, to a state infinitely worse than nonexistence. Thus sin is in it's own nature pregnant with infinite mischief, and tends to the total ruin of universal being ; to destroy all the good of the universe, and introduce infinite, eternal evil. The tendency is so direct and strong, that this would be the certain issue of it, was it not prevented by infinite power, wisdom and goodness.

If then the crime of any transgression is great in proportion to the malignity of it, and the greatness of the evil it tends to, which I think none can deny ; it is hence certain that every sin against GOD is infinitely criminal, in his sight. How fit and necessary

making atonement, and obeying the divine law, would have been so far from availing in behalf of sinners, that it would have been itself a most daring crime, a proposal and attempt most dishonorable to GOD and his law ; an act of high rebellion against GOD. Therefore, instead of being any advantage to the sinner, he would by such an undertaking, or the least inclination to do it, become a rebel himself ; a sinner of the first magnitude.

If all the angels in heaven, however great, worthy and numerous they are, while yet they are no more than creatures, should unite to interpose in the behalf of one sinner, who had been guilty of but one sin, and that the least that is possible ; and offer their worthiness, yea, their whole eternal interest and happiness, and to subject themselves to perfect, eternal misery for his sake, that he might, out of respect to this, be pardoned, and received to the rewards of eternal life : I say, should all the angels in heaven thus interpose, the proposal and offer would not only be rejected, but would itself be an act of high rebellion, and carry in it the most abominable contempt of GOD and his law, and a virtual justifying the sinner and taking his part
against

is it then that the sinner should be threatened with eternal destruction ! How necessary that the atonement which ransoms from this infinite evil, should be something infinitely great ! And is not a mere creature, any finite being, infinitely unequal to this ? A desire that sin should be pardoned on the account of what such an one can do or suffer, or even a thought in favor of it, carries in it enmity to being in general, which is enmity against GOD.

against GOD ; so would bring them all under the curse, and sink them into hell, without helping the sinner at all. For such an offer and attempt would be so far from honoring GOD and his law, and an act of love and friendship to him, that it would carry in it a denial of GOD's infinite greatness and worthiness ; and so be the highest affront to the Divine Majesty.

Therefore was not Christ infinitely higher and greater than all the angels in heaven, and did he not exceed them infinitely in excellence and worth, he could not be an High Priest, in whom sinners might reasonably put any trust for pardon and acceptance with GOD. Yea, on such a supposition, trusting in him would not only be unsafe and dangerous, but direct rebellion against GOD, and infinitely criminal. *

The true christian's hope and trust in Christ for pardon and salvation first began, when he first began

* WHAT then shall we say of those who profess to trust in a meer creature for all this ; which is the case of all who deny the Divinity of Christ ?—But the case of such will be more particularly attended to in the sequel.

AND what shall be said of those who trust in their own righteousness to recommend them to GOD, under whatever profession this is done ? This is daring presumption, and high handed wickedness, being a direct opposition to the divine character, and GOD's holy law. In this view it appears that all the good works of such, in which they trust for infinitely more than they might reasonably do, were they perfectly holy, are heaven daring sins ; the most abominable rebellion against GOD, and direct opposition to Jesus Christ and the gospel.

began to see and consider him in his true character, and this great High Priest appeared to him in an infinitely grand and honorable light ; in the light in which he is set in the first 14 verses of the first chapter of John, and as he is represented in the chapters preceeding our text : even the true GOD, who has made, and does uphold all things ; and who in the fulness of time was incarnate, and became a man : and to make full atonement for sin, and obtain favor and salvation for sinners, took upon him the form of a servant, and being obedient unto death. In this view of Jesus Christ, I say, the true christian's hope and trust in him first began. And it never afterwards is exercised and flourishes in any other way but in considering Christ in this his true character as the great High Priest. And his hope and confidence in him for pardon and acceptance is always as is his view and sense of Christ's dignity and excellence.

Well then may christians be directed and exhorted always to attend to this high and glorious character and keep it in view, so as never to loose sight of their great High Priest Christ Jesus ; for so far as He is out of view they must cease to trust in him for pardon and acceptance before GOD, and all true ground of hope will be out of sight.

5. THE true christian hopes for redemption from the power of sin, only in the view of Christ in his high and exalted character.

When a person sees what sin is, what fast hold it has of him, how deep and strongly it is rooted

in his heart ; how powerful and various are the workings of it ; how grievous and deadly are the disorders and wounds of his sinful heart, utterly incurable by any finite wisdom and power : I say, when a person becomes acquainted with his state in this respect, he finds he wants a Redeemer and Saviour infinitely powerful, wise and good ; and that any other would be infinitely insufficient for him. He therefore could have no hope of redemption from sin by Christ, did he not view him as infinitely greater and more sufficient than any meer creature, even infinitely wise, powerful and kind. But when he beholds and considers Christ in the height of his character, as being thus infinitely wise, powerful and good, with whom nothing is impossible, he with confidence and joy commits his disordered, sinful, wretched soul into his hands, assured that he is able to cure and sanctify his heart, and make him perfectly holy in the most kind, wisest and best way, though it is infinitely beyond him to see *how* it can be done.

Many a person, ignorant of the nature of sin, and of the degree of extent and power sin had in his heart, has seen no need that he stood in of an infinite redeemer ; yea, has stupidly and foolishly thought he had a sufficiency of his own to recover himself from sin to holiness, and has trusted wholly in his own heart for it. But not so the true christian. He finds he wants a Redeemer to deliver him from sin, and bring him to perfect holiness, who is higher than the heavens, has creating power, and is able to subdue all things unto himself. And in order to keep

up

up his hope and courage, he must constantly have in view, and attentively consider such an infinitely great and mighty Redeemer.

It does therefore from hence also appear how important and necessary it is that christians should consider and constantly keep in view their Redeemer and Saviour, in all the extent and grandeur of his person and character.

6. As christians are to ask for all they want in the name of Christ, it is of importance, and even necessary that they should well understand and keep in view the character of him in whose name they ask.

Prayer is a great and constant duty of a christian : It is that by which he lives ; and he receives all from GOD in the way of prayer. If he does not ask, he will not receive. Christ has directed and commanded all his disciples to ask in his name ; and nothing is to be obtained by them in any other way of praying. Yea, for a sinful creature to pray in any other way or name, is most presumptuous arrogance and impiety, and a direct affront to the most high Majesty of heaven and earth. But Christ has promised that whatsoever is asked in his name, shall be given. But to ask in the name of Christ, is to depend on his worthiness alone, as that on account of which we shall be accepted and heard. Therefore asking in his name supposes and implies a view and sense of heart of his greatness and worthiness. So far as the infinitely excellent and worthy character of Christ is out of sight and

disregarded by any one, just so far he is without a true spirit of prayer, and does not ask in Christ's name. And on the other hand, if this great High Priest is rightly considered in all the grandeur and worthiness of his person and character, the christian is enabled and encouraged to ask in his name, and comes with freedom and boldness to the throne of grace.

Thus important and necessary is it that christians should always keep in view and well consider the great High Priest of their profession, as it is in this way only that they ask in his name, and are accepted and heard in their prayers and offerings.

7. It belongs to the character of christians, "Whatsoever they do, in word or in deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."* But this is to do all they do in a view and sense of his true character, and as an hearty acknowledgement of it. Hence it appears that christians do in no case exercise themselves and act agreeable to their profession, unless they have in view, and rightly consider the character of Jesus Christ.

WHAT now remains to be attended to is the improvement of this subject in a few reflections which are suggested by what has been said.

1. How important is it that Christ should be preached and constantly exhibited to view in all the grandeur and glory of his character, in the public instructions which christians sit under!

That

* Col. iii. 17.

That which christians ought chiefly to attend to, and which is highly useful and most necessary to be always considered by them, ought to be constantly set before them and proposed to their consideration by public teachers. To preach the gospel, is to preach Christ ; to exhibit and display his true character : and that preaching which is not adapted to this end, and has no reference to him, is not preaching the gospel, nor is it like to be of any great advantage to christians.

Many professed preachers of the gospel have been greatly deficient here. Many leave Christ, very much, or altogether, out of their preaching : so most or all they say is not the gospel, but something else, which, though it may be applauded by many, is really very low, insipid and mean, in comparison with the gospel of Christ, who is the wisdom of GOD and the power of GOD to the true christian. And there have been many who when they have spoken of Christ, have left out the most essential part of his character, and never bring it into view in all they say of him. They often use the name of Christ, and have much to say about him : but all they have said of him is either not true, so gives him a wrong and false character ; or if true, it falls short of his whole character ; yea, leaves the most essential part of it, and what may be justly considered as comprising all it's glory, wholly out, unthought of and neglected. If they do not expressly deny the infinite greatness, the divine splendor and glory of Christ's person and character, which is essential to his Godhead, they never,

never, or rarely, say any thing about it, or that which implies it, so as to bring it into view, and hold it up to be attentively considered.

However the multitude may admire some such preachers, it is certain the true christian will not be fed, but famish and starve under such preaching as this, while that which is the proper support, food and life of his soul, even Christ in his true and glorious character, is not set before him.

WHAT then shall we say of those who expressly deny the Divinity of Christ, and represent him as no more than a meer creature ! If they do not preach Christ who silently pass over his Divine dignity and glory, infinitely the greatest, and most essential part of his character, and without which there is nothing in his person and character that can be the reasonable ground of hope, support and life to the true christian ; must not they who expressly deny that he is the true GOD, and consequently hold that he is only a meer creature, be justly looked upon and treated as preaching against Christ, and perverting & overthrowing the whole gospel ? They may speak in strong terms, and high and pompous strains of the dignity and excellence of Christ ; of free grace, and salvation by him ; of atonement by his blood ; of the high esteem and love all christians ought to exercise towards him ; of the importance of faith and trust in him, &c. But when it is considered that, whatever pompous words they use, they are applied to one infinitely below GOD, being but a meer creature, all they lay

say on this head, appears to be flat and low, and is really nothing but unmeaning jargon, which is infinitely dishonorable to Christ, and leaves the christian without any true ground of hope and comfort. It is infinitely dishonorable to GOD to suppose that a meer creature, be he the greatest that ever GOD made, or that he can make ; I say, that a *meer creature* should make atonement for sin ; such atonement that GOD will, out of respect to that, pardon the sinner : and that he should pay such obedience, and his name, his person and character should be so acceptable and worthy in GOD's sight, as that from regard and love to him, a guilty wretch should be received to the highest favors. I say, such a notion is infinitely dishonorable to GOD the Lawgiver, as it is a denial of the infinite evil of sin, and consequently of his infinite excellence, dignity and worthiness. This is also infinitely dishonorable to the Mediator, and, in effect, robs him of all his glory, and degrades him infinitely more than any meer creature can be degraded and dishonored, on any possible supposition whatsoever.

And this robs the true christian of all hope ; for on this supposition he is left without any mediator that he can trust in. He, in a view and sense of the infinite worthiness and glory of the most high GOD ; of the reasonableness and excellence of the divine law ; and consequently of the infinite criminalness and malignity of sin ; which brings into view his own infinite odiousness and ill-desert : He, in this view, I say, feels that no person can make atonement for him, but one of infinite dignity and worth, who has something infinitely

infinitely great to offer. And did he not see and believe in such an one, he must sink into absolute despair ; and could not reasonably *desire* that any mercy should be shewed to him. He therefore who denies the Divinity of Christ, does what he can to rob the christian of all his treasure—of all his hopes—of all his salvation ! And the reason why he himself wants no greater a mediator and saviour than a meer creature ; and calls that an atonement for sin which such an one has made, and trusts in it : I say, the reason of this is his blindness and insensibility with respect to his own character, even his infinite guilt and vileness ; which is grounded in his shocking insensibility of the glory of the divine character, and enmity to it.

THIS view of the matter will afford us, I conceive, a plain and easy answer to a question which has been sometimes put ; viz. Whether they who believe the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and could not trust in him for pardon and salvation, did they not consider him to be truly GOD as well as man, may and ought to have charity for those, and look on them as good christians, who expressly deny this doctrine, and represent those as real idolaters who pay any regards and honors to him, which may not be given to a meer creature ?—

THESE persons have in truth infinitely different ideas and thoughts of Jesus Christ, and consequently must differ in the leading and essential doctrines of christianity ; so that they do not all know and acknowledge the true & only Saviour,

or believe in the same person and character. If he who believes in Jesus Christ as a divine person, as truly GOD, and places all his hopes of salvation by him on this foundation, is right, which he must think himself to be ; then he who denies this article is wrong ; and so wrong, that he does, in the view of the other, leave out of his thoughts and religion infinitely the greatest and most glorious part of the character of the Mediator, even so as quite to spoil it and render it worthless ; so does not consider, believe and trust in the same person and character, which is the object of his faith ; but one infinitely different. How can these two walk together, who are so far from being agreed, that they oppose each other most directly in the highest and most leading article of christianity, in their infinitely different & opposite notions of the character of the author of it ; and which really comprises the whole ? The former looks on the other as robbing Christ of his chief glory, and denying that to belong to him which is the only ground of faith and trust in him. How then can the professed faith of the latter in one who, in the view of the former, can be no more a saviour of sinners, than Mahomet himself, or any of the imaginary deities of the heathen, recommend him to his charity any more than if he made no profession at all ? Yea, does not his profession lie against him, seeing it is most dishonorable to Christ, and even a high degree of blasphemy against him ; and is a most glaring evidence of his ignorance of GOD and of himself : Yea, of his stupidity, pride and enmity to GOD, that he can trust to a mere creature as a sufficient saviour for him, who can

make a proper and full atonement for his sin, and has worthiness enough to recommend him to GOD ? Surely such an one (if his heart is answerable to his profession) does not know what sin is ; is quite insensible of his own unworthiness and guilt ; is conceited and proud with respect to his own character, and has the most dishonorable, contemptuous thoughts of GOD.

In a word, if Christ the Redeemer and Saviour of sinners is GOD ; and if he was not so, would be infinitely unable to atone for the least sin, or save one sinner ; then he who acknowledges no other Christ and saviour but a mere creature, changes the glory of the only true GOD and Saviour into a corruptible, weak, helpless man ; and puts his trust in this creature of his own imagination for that which a Divine Person, a GOD only can do : so is giving that honor to the creature, which belongs to GOD alone ; and is really a stupid, wicked idolater, as really so, and doubtless much more criminally, than they who worship and trust in gods that can neither hear nor see, nor go.

And must *he* be esteemed a pious man and a good christian, while, according to his profession, he is guilty of all this pride, and contempt of GOD and the Redeemer, and lives in the practice of the most abominable and aggravated idolatry ! If such may pass for good men, friends to GOD and his law, and to Jesus Christ ; as well may all the popish and heathen idolaters that have been, or now are in the world.

I know

I know some who would be thought to believe the Divinity of Christ, or at least do not deny this doctrine, have declared their charity for those who expressly deny it ; and have been forward and zealous to rank some of them among the number of eminently holy men and good christians. But this is not only very absurd and shocking ; but really carries with it no small degree of impiety & profaneness. It seems to be trifling with Christianity at a great rate. Surely Christianity is not worth much, if it is no matter of importance whether the author of it, and who is the revealed Saviour for sinners to trust in, be a GOD, or a meer creature ; so that they may be equally good christians, whatever is their belief with respect to Jesus Christ.* If it is no

D 2 matter

* I DESIRE it may be considered, whether the ordaining councils who neglect to examine candidates for the ministry, with respect to their religious sentiments ; and they who zealously oppose such examinations, do not by this conduct openly declare that it is with them no matter of importance what men believe, what their sentiments are, and what doctrines they hold with respect to Jesus Christ ; or what thoughts they have of his character and religion : that they may be “apt to teach,” and “hold fast the faithful word,” so as to “be able by *sound doctrine*, both to exhort and convince the gainsayers,” whatever sense they put upon the words in the bible, or though they have no understanding of them at all. And is not this, in effect, openly to declare, that the truths of the gospel are of no importance, and that christianity is really but a trifling affair !

The conduct of these gentlemen is really surprizing, and none need to be at a loss what will be the fate of christianity, so far as their influence reaches. All the

matter what they think of Christ, but may differ infinitely in their sentiments of his person and character ; then it is certainly no matter whether they have any thoughts about Christ at all, or any ideas of him, or belief in him ; and the Deist who rejects Christ's whole character, may be as good a man, and as certainly happy forever as the best christian who has the most just idea of Christ, and is a true believer in him. It would therefore be no wonder at all if they who are so forward and zealous to dub professed Arians good christians, and canonize them as eminent saints, should extend their charity further, even to professed Deists, who blaspheme the name of Christ ; and should call upon them and professed christians (as a noted writer has indeed done already *) to mutual forbearance and charity ; for though they differ so much about the character of Christ, this is but a trifling affair, while they are agreed in all the most important articles of religion !

If

the distinguishing, important doctrines of it will be neglected ; and instead of preaching the gospel, sermons will be either insipid dissertations upon something else ; or filled with stupid inconsistence ; else be only florid harangues, without any meaning. Unless perhaps, when times and circumstances will bear it, another system of doctrines will be preached up, which at present are somewhat unpopular ; therefore cannot be with safety expressly and openly espoused : For the sake of which, that they may be *privily* introduced ; and from a desire and design to extirpate the more commonly received, popular doctrines, many think they have good reason to conclude this method with respect to candidates is gone into,

* Chubb, see his Tracts, P. 425, &c.

If Arians are to be esteemed good christians by those whose thoughts of Christ are infinitely different from theirs, why may not the Mahometans also be ranked among truly pious and good men, in the sure way to eternal life ? They have not the good luck indeed of being called christians : But they acknowledge Jesus Christ to be a true prophet, sent of GOD ; so are in a sense believers in him. They may perhaps have as high notions of the character of Christ as many professed christians who deny his Divinity ; though by the unhappy prejudices of education, they set Mahomet above him, as being a greater person. Shall this mistake damn them ? Surely no ! If the errors and blasphemies the Arians are guilty of relating to Jesus Christ, in the clear sun-shine of divine revelation, shall not be fatal to them. *

In

* I KNOW this will be thought by some exceeding uncharitable, harsh and cruel. They will say, " it is intolerable, and argues a vast degree of arrogance and pride, as well as ignorance and a base contractedness of mind, to doom all those to destruction, who have not been able to see that Jesus Christ is the true GOD, and equal with the Father. This is a very disputable point, and many great and, to all appearance, good men have taken the negative side."

Ans. All this may as truly, and with as much propriety be said of professed deists. It is a very disputable point, whether Jesus of Nazareth was sent of God, or was a wicked impostor ; that is, it has been greatly disputed : as much perhaps as any one point that respects christianity. And many who are acknowledged to be great men ; and some, at least, whose moral conduct has been regular and unexceptionable, have not been able to see the evidence of his divine mission, and have improved all their powers and advantages in opposition to christianity.

In short, these charitable persons are either themselves Arians, and do not really believe the divinity of Jesus Christ; but are, for certain reasons, unwilling to let their sentiments on this head be known; so are industriously concealing them: Or if, through the force of education, or on some other ground, they assent to this doctrine, they do not understand the true reason and import of it; so have never seen their need of such a saviour: consequently have never yet considered the Apostle and High Priest of their profession as all true christians do. In this view, their *extensive charity*, upon which they value themselves, and of which they boast, is so far from being in their favor, as an evidence of the greatness of their minds, or the goodness of their hearts, that it is rather a very clear and striking evidence that they have never yet understood the true nature and genius of genuine Christianity; that they do not know Christ, so have not received the witness that GOD has given concerning him, and truly believed on his name.*

II. THIS

* OBJECTION. We are told that he who has not CHARITY is nothing. CHARITY is the ornament and glory of a christian; and where this is not, there is no real religion. Is it not astonishing then that any should be condemned for their charity; that this should be reckoned against them, as an argument that they who exercise it in the utmost stretch of it are no christians!

ANS. In such a way of talk as this the word *charity* is greatly abused, and perverted from its true meaning, at least the scripture sense of it. Charity is love

to

II. THIS subject naturally introduces a short, but most interesting and important question, which Jesus Christ himself once put to those to whom he was speaking, It is this, **WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?**

We

to God and our neighbour, which is the whole that the divine law requires ; and therefore comprises all true holiness. This love to God and man has no tendency to lead the person who exercises it to think all are good men and true christians who profess christianity : much less does it *confist* in this. But, on the contrary, it gives a degree of true discerning in spiritual things, which others have not ; and leads the mind to such attention to the divine character, and fills the heart of the true christian with such a tenderness and jealousy for the honor of this character, that he more readily discerns, and tenderly feels, what is opposition to it. And he will be ready to hate those who in their words and profession appear to hate God ; and look on them as enemies to God, and to himself, who rise up against God (Psal. cxxxix. 21, 22.) whatever their external conduct may otherwise be : For God may be as directly and visibly opposed in profession and words, as in conduct. And to have no discerning in this case ; but to embrace those as good christians who openly oppose and speak against Christ is so far from being an exercise of charity, that it is a glaring evidence of their want of true love to Christ.

St. Paul, in the exercise of all this charity, pronounced those accursed who preach another gospel ; and told the Galatians that a mistake about the ground of the sinner's acceptance with God was fatal (Gal. i. 8, 9. ii. 21. v. 2.) And St. John, while he is in the warmest manner recommending charity or love, declares that they who hold not the truth concerning Christ, had no interest in God's favor ; and orders christians to reject them (2 Joh. 9, 10.)

Many

We may consider this question as now urged upon us all. What views and apprehensions have we of Jesus Christ? How, and in what a light do we consider this Apostle and great High Priest of our profession? Upon this our character, and our eternal state depend. We are true christians or not, according as our thoughts and views of Christ are: a true answer to this question therefore will determine our character as christians. And upon this our eternal state will turn. If we know Christ, and have right views and thoughts of him, we are then his friends indeed, and shall dwell with him forever. But if his true character is not understood by us, and our views and thoughts of him are essentially wrong, and we continue in this error and darkness until death, we shall be excluded his presence and dwell in darkness forever. How greatly then does this question concern us all! We may well think of it with solemn attention and self-application. And let it not be put off now without an answer.—Suffer me then to urge this question upon this auditory, by descending to a few particulars.—

Have you well considered how GREAT an High Priest Christ is? That though he was in the world a mean despised man, he is the maker and

Many speak of charity as if it wholly consisted in a readiness to think *every one* a true christian. And the more unlike a christian any one appears, speaks and acts, the higher degree of charity is required to believe he is a good christian. And he is the best man who can exercise the greatest stretch of charity towards them who, in this sense, have the most need of it,

and Lord of all things, has infinite dignity and worthiness, is infinite in power, wisdom and goodness : Is a Priest on a throne, having all power in heaven and earth, and all things in his hands ? * Have you been fully convinced that such an high priest became you, who is higher than the heavens ; and that no other is sufficient to make atonement and reconciliation for the sins of men ?

Have you rightly considered Christ's infinite excellence and worthiness ? In the view of this have your hearts been attracted to him in the exercise of the highest esteem and love ? And in a sense of your own infinite unworthiness and guilt, which is in the most striking manner declared in all he has done and suffered ; and in a view of his infinite excellence and worthiness, of his boundless merit and righteousness, do you trust in him alone for pardon and acceptance with GOD ? Is his merit and worthiness the only thing you trust in to recommend you to GOD : and with respect to this do you make mention of his name alone, placing all your hopes on him, and asking all you want in his name ; so making him alone your great High Priest ?

What do you think of the knowledge of Jesus Christ ? Does this appear to be happiness and life, in comparison with which you count all other attainments as worthless and nothing ? † Do you find you can have no peace, comfort and joy, but in a view and sense of the character of Christ : that so far as he is out of sight darkness and death spread over your soul : that your heart

is warmed, refreshed and invigorated only in the light and shining of this sun of righteousness ?

Do you trust in Christ alone as your redeemer from the power of sin and satan ? In a sense of the dreadful disorders of your soul by sin, how defiled and ruined you are by it, do you hope in him alone as your sanctifier ?—

Do you long and seek after conformity to Christ in the temper of your minds, and in your conduct, as the greatest privilege : And is the happiness and heaven you are desiring, that which shall consist in being where he is, and beholding his glory ?

III. WHAT has been said may be improved as an excitement to all professing christians to hearken to the exhortation in the text, and attentively consider the Apostle and High Priest of their profession Christ Jesus.

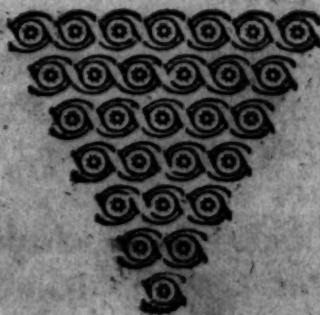
Your christianity, your comfort and happiness all lie in this. In his light alone can you see and enjoy light, even the light of life. Would you make progress in knowledge and holiness, and be wise unto salvation, you must sit constantly at the feet of this great Apostle and divine Prophet, who teaches not as man teaches. If this sun of righteousness has risen upon you, and you have ever beheld his glory ; by constantly attending to his person and character, ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall : and your path shall be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” *

Jesus

Jesus Christ is an object so vastly extensive, and infinitely great, that he cannot be attended to too much and too long. No matter how soon and early in life persons begin to consider Christ in earnest. The theme is boundless, the subject inexhaustible. Here then is a foundation laid for the most attentive and engaged inquiries, and highest and growing entertainment of the redeemed forever in heaven : " Where there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it : for the glory of GOD does lighten it, and the LAMB is the light thereof." *

I shall close in the words of St. Peter, with which he concludes his second epistle. " Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye knew these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST : To Him be glory both now and forever. AMEN."

* Rev. xii. 23.



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